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ABSTRACT

The manual, developed by the Realistic Transition Project in Washington State, reviews program experiences and recommended best practices for serving mildly handicapped students in their final years of school (ages 17-21). The project focused on employment with formal class teaching secondary to community work experience. A skills curriculum covered money management, social skills for apartment living, job search, and interpersonal skills for employment. Support in job procurement and maintenance was provided each student and employers were assisted in making job modifications to suit handicapped workers. The program served 22 to 26 students with two teachers (who also served as caseworkers) and two classroom aides. Administrative support was provided in the areas of communication, coordination between vocational and special education, and staff evaluation. Changes over the program's 3 years included provision of services during the daytime rather than evening, and moving from a group-centered approach to a more individualized and flexible approach. Guidelines for similar programs are given for the following areas: student population, curriculum, class schedule, school and community resources, employment assistance, setting, staffing, administrative support, marketing, evaluation, and flexibility. Appended are sample student schedules and the project brochure. (DB)

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SPECIAL EDUCATION

Vocational Special Needs Programs

CONTINUING EDUCATION PROJECT: A REALISTIC TRANSITION MODEL FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL HANDICAPPED

MANUAL FOR BEST PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES

University of Washington
Seattle, Washington

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Director

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CONTINUING EDUCATION PROJECT:
A REALISTIC TRANSITION MODEL FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL HANDICAPPED

MANUAL FOR BEST PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES

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INTRODUCTION

Our public education system holds out to all Americans the promise of preparation for productive adult lives. Although recent legislation has explicitly extended this promise to the nation's handicapped students, we are still far from meeting this goal. Many handicapped students, nearly all those with mild disabilities, can succeed in the adult world of work. But they need special training and support to do so, and, until recently, there has been little available information on how to provide this assistance.

In the past few years, this has begun to change. A number of efforts have been made to develop and test potential means of helping secondary handicapped students make the often difficult transition to adult independence.

The Realistic Transition Project (RTP), a joint project of the University of Washington and the Highline School District, was one of these. It was carried out from January, 1985 through December, 1987, with funding from the U.S. Department of Education.

Although the RTP model was developed in a multicultural, urban environment, we believe the model is transferable to a wide range of educational environments serving secondary special needs students. This manual summarizes the experiences that may be helpful to others who work with this population. It reviews successes and problems in various aspects of the project and outlines a list of recommended "best practices" that seem essential to a successful program. Project data compiled over tne course of the RTP are presented elsewhere. Individuals interested in examining these data should request a copy of the RTP final report from Dr. Greg Weisenstein, Director of Vocational Special Needs Program, 407 Miller Hall, DQ-12, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195.

Population Served

The RTP model was designed to help mildly handicapped secondary students move from the school setting to the world of work. The population served were in their final years of school (ages 17-21).

At this age, students are motivated to succeed in work experience programs like the RTP. As they approach graduation, they begin to develop adult attitudes toward work. They become more concerned about their future and begin to realize that successful work experience will assist in their transition to the world of adult independence. They are more likely to develop realistic career goals than are younger students.

Income generated through competitive employment provides additional motivation. Although socioeconomic status varies, most of the students in transition programs like the RTP come from families with limited financial resources. For them, successful employment can meet their own financial needs and assist in meeting those of their family. The model is thus attractive to

students who would otherwise choose to drop out of school in an attempt to earn an income.

The program served students who could be categorized into 3 groups in regard to credits needed:

a) Severely credit deficient students received vocational training and placements through the RTP. Upon completion of the program, or at age 21, if academic skills permitted, they were referred to a GED program or community college to pursue a state high school equivalency diploma.

b) Minimally credit deficient students could earn some academic or elective credits while attending the RTP to satisfy graduation requirements. They could graduate in the district or receive a state high school equivalency diploma. In addition to RTP classes, these students were employed or enrolled in vocational training programs.

c) Thirteenth-year students could enter the program having met all graduation requirements but needing additional vocational training and/or support for job placement. These students elected to defer receipt of their diploma and continue to receive services through RTP classroom and employment activities. They received elective credits which appeared on their transcripts.

The population served by RTP included students with mild mental retardation, learning disabilities, hearing impairment, behavior disorders and multiple mild handicapping conditions who qualified for special education services and met certain attitude and skill requirements (described later in this report).

Classroom Schedules and Credits

The students' educational and personal needs were highly varied. In order to be able to respond effectively to these individual differences, the program structure was extremely flexible. Students attended RTP classes for 2 1/2 hours a day, two days a week. Their remaining time was spent in a variety of ways: working at a paid job, completing vocational training, or taking academic and practical classes in the local high schools. Each student's program was unique and individualized to fit specific personal and employment needs. (See Appendix A for sample student schedules.)

Usually, students received 1-4 academic, elective, or occupational credits each semester for enrolling in the RTP. Some specific academic credits needed by students for graduation were offered through the classroom component or through independent study. Academic credits equivalent in number to those earned in a full-day academic program could not be offered, except through independent study electives.

Entry to the Program

Students were referred to the program by the district's multidisciplinary teams. The special education administrator then evaluated the recommendation and placed the student in the program if appropriate. Out-of-district referrals were made directly to the special education administrator. (Active marketing of the program to district special education teachers, psychologists, counselors, and administrators as well as parents and students helped maximize the appropriateness of referrals.) Enrollment was open throughout the year, and students could contract to complete their participation at the end of any semester.

In order to be accepted into the RTP, students must be motivated to achieve success at work. They were required to meet the following behavior and skill requirements:

Transportation: Students should be able to travel independently to and from their jobs and school, using the most appropriate form of transportation available (options included public bus, taxi, private vehicle, or transportation provided by friends, relatives, or coworkers). In some cases, specialized transportation training was provided by district special education teachers or high school driver education classes.

Personal Appearance: Students should be aware that, depending upon the job, standards of appearance may be established by their employers and required in the work environment. Evidence of maintaining appropriate personal cleanliness, grooming, and apparel was required.

Complying with Regulations and Rules: Students should demonstrate a willingness to comply with rules and regulations that will be imposed by employers.

Potential to Learn and Perform Entry Level Job Skills: Students should possess sufficient cognitive and physical ability to meet minimal competencies in skills required in an entry-level job within one week of on-the-job training.

Upon entering the RTP program, the student's interests, skills, and abilities were evaluated at the district's Vocational Assessment Center using the Micro-Computer Evaluation and Screening Assessment (MESA) (Valpar International, 1984). This instrument evaluates students' physical capacities and mobility, eye-hand coordination, spatial discrimination, memory, reasoning, and perceptual aptitudes, as well as vocational interests and vocational awareness. Project staff correlated the data gained from this assessment with informal student interviews and used the information to develop a career profile for each student. This was then used to assist the student in making career decisions and exploring vocational programs, training, and employment opportunities. RTP staff also integrated the MESA results with the job search component of the curriculum.

Curriculum

The focus of the Realistic Transition Project was clearly employment. Formal classroom teaching was secondary to community work experience; work schedules were a priority, and school schedules were adjusted to accommodate them. Because classroom time was limited, emphasis was placed on the teaching of functional life skills. The curriculum also offered students an opportunity to discuss issues that arose on the job. This discussion provided a chance to help students solve immediate problems and prepare to deal with similar situations in the future.

The RTP served as a field testing site for a skills curriculum developed by the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center in Mental Retardation at the University of Oregon which includes sections on money management, social skills for apartment living, job search, and interpersonal skills training for employment, as summarized below:

Money Management: The Money Management curriculum is divided into four main sections:

1. Budgeting - deals with managing a monthly budget.
2. Bill paying - teaches students how to read and pay the variety of bills that are commonly received each month.
3. Checking account management
4. Savings account management - the last two sections teach students how to open an account, how to deposit and withdraw money, and how to balance the registers.

Job Search: The Job Search unit, which is divided into 5 modules, addresses skills that are necessary for employment. The modules are:

1. Development of a resume.
2. Interview skills. Prior to the first lesson, students are interviewed on videotape. For the next few weeks, they work on an interview script, memorizing answers to pertinent questions. The final test for tne interview skills module is a posttest on the videocamera.
3. Job Search Script. Role modeling is a key factor in this module, where students rehearse what they say when going to a business to inquire about employment.
4. Job Search Notebook. Students compile information into a notebook which contains a resume, letters of recommendation, a completed application, and other materials useful to have at a job interview.
5. Completing a job application.

Social Skills for Apartment Living: The Social Skills unit has four modules:

1. Introduction to saying "No." Students learn the importance of being able to say "no" to a request from a stranger.
2. Introduction to asking for help. Students demonstrate the ability to initiate a conversation when they need to ask for help, either in public or from family and friends.

3. Introduction to self-management. Students demonstrate the ability to act appropriately in public.
4. Introduction to cooperation. Students learn to cooperate with people in their lives, including roommates, friends, and persons of authority.

Interpersonal Skills Training for Employment: These lessons are designed to teach skills which have been empirically identified as important for job tenure. The focus of both assessment and training is on developing strategies for effective interactions with supervisors and co-workers. Within the area of supervisor-worker relationships, the issues covered are: 1) responding to criticism and correction, 2) following instructions, and 3) requesting assistance. In the co-worker area, the topics covered are 1) cooperative behavior, 2) responding to teasing and provocation, and 3) resolving personal concerns. Each situation is presented on a short videotaped lesson in which students are asked to solve the problem in the best possible way. The correct solution is then presented and discussed.

In addition to lessons covered in the Oregon curriculum, some students required individual instruction in such skills as shopping, locating apartments, obtaining public assistance and financial aid, ordering food and eating in restaurants, and using leisure activities resources. This instruction was provided by RTP staff when time permitted or by other district special educators.

Employment Interventions

Based on the individual employment profile mentioned earlier, support in job procurement and maintenance was provided to each student by combining program and community resources to meet students' needs. The job search was conducted four ways:

1. Contacts with agencies, acquaintances, etc. - students were referred to agencies such as the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and the Job Training Partnership Act program (JTPA) that are knowledgeable about current job openings and training programs. These agencies would likely be contacted by students for assistance during their adult lives; through the RTP, they learned to identify and use the services available before leaving the security of the secondary schools. Students were also encouraged to contact family members, friends, former teachers and employers notifying them of their desire for work and soliciting their assistance.

2. Review of job opening announcements - in newspaper and magazine advertisements, Job Service bulletins, trade journals, and community college job boards.

3. Employer-initiated referrals - These resulted when employers contacted district staff regarding current openings.

4. Job referrals development - conducted by program staff and/or community agencies, with businesses in which the student expressed an interest. Staff members contacted prospective employers and explained the RTP

program, the student's abilities, training and support provided by the program and community agencies, and available incentives (Targeted Job Tax Credit, On the Job Training, Try-Out Employment, etc.). The staff then obtained a detailed job description - either directly from the employer or through staff observation of, and/or actual participation in, the job.

If an appropriate match between the student and the job did not appear feasible, the employer was thanked and informed that future students might be referred if appropriate. (We have found it best to be as straightforward as possible regarding skills and limitations of our students.) If the job match appeared positive, the student was referred for an interview. The employer was again contacted after the interview is over. If the student was hired, a meeting with the employer was arranged to determine the training schedule, hours, wage, start date, financial reimbursements, and so on. If any community agencies would be involved in the employment of the student, representatives also attended this meeting. When students found jobs on their own, project staff communicated with the employer as much as the employer and student deemed necessary.

Students were encouraged to conduct as much of the job search as they could independently perform. With information from the student interviews and assessment, staff members supported the student's job search as required.

Work Experiences

Work experiences were arranged for students who were not ready for competitive employment but wished to gain experiences or sample a particular type of job. Many appropriate sites were available within the school district and the community. Placements used by the RTP were in clerical, landscaping, food service, custodial, equipment repair, transportation and maintenance fields.

Employer Assistance

RTP staff members also provided a variety of services to employers to assist them in making job modifications to suit handicapped workers and to educate them about the effects of handicapping conditions on work performance. These services have included:

1. redesigning task sequences to fit students' cognitive and physical abilities.

2. orientation and/or on-the-job training of the student/employee.

3. designing visual or auditory aids to assist the student/employee to master work tasks with minimal direction from the employer.

4. insuring appropriate travel arrangements (working out bus schedules, bus stop locations, and designing routes for students who drive).

5. providing support to employers to help them work effectively with handicapped employees (including frequent follow-up phone calls while the student is employed and participating in the program).

6. facilitating the purchase of individualized equipment needed (e.g. TTY for a worker with hearing impairment, headphones to minimize distractions, etc.).

7. transferring the support delivery to adult service agencies near the termination of the student's enrollment in RTP.

Summer Support

Support to students, employers, parents, and community agencies should be available throughout the summer recess to prevent regression of student performance on jobs. The RTP used an aide to provide support and contacts for students and the kinds of employer assistance described above. (This aide did not teach the RTP curriculum, orient new students, or develop new jobs during the summer months.)

Additional Support Services

Use of existing support services within the school district and the community extended the resources of the RTP and also helped prepare students to take advantage of these services after graduation. Among the support services used were:

Consulting Psychological Services. Psychological services, provided by the school district, may include personal counseling, family consultation, psychoeducational assessment, substance abuse counseling,suicide prevention, and crisis intervention. Students could be referred to the district-provided services when needed or to mental health services in the local community, including individual and family counseling and workshops in anger management, decision making, and assertiveness training, drug and alcohol intervention, and so on.

Post-secondary Vocational Training and Placement. Students who wish to receive more extensive training than that provided by the secondary school program may be referred to community colleges, vocational technical institutes, and other community institutions for additional educational services.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

In addition to the curriculum, services, and other program components just summarized, a number of structural factors were found to be essential to the success of a transition program such as RTP. These are discussed in the next section.

Setting

At the time of writing this manual, the RTP was located at the Sunnydale Community Center, which houses a variety of community services/agencies. While owned and operated by the Highline School District, Sunnydale is not one of the district's regular school facilities.

The setting was found to be an important component of the model. Because the focus of a transition program is on the world of work, the preferred setting is an off-campus location that minimizes distractions and creates an adult environment distinctly different from high school settings. This location should be accessible to community and school resources, transportation, and businesses and industries that offer entry-level employment to young adults.

Staff

The RTP was staffed by two district teachers and two classroom aides, to serve from 22 to 26 students. A maximum teacher/student ratio of 1:12 is recommended to accommodate the variety of student needs.

Program teachers functioned as both teachers and caseworkers. They provided educational interventions (the RTP curriculum), employment interventions (job procurement and job maintenance assistance), and helped students take advantage of resources such as community colleges, job training centers, district academic programs, the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), other adult services, and job opportunities.

The abilities of these staff members were critical determinants of the program's success or failure. A number of special skills and characteristics were found necessary to meet the high demands placed on program teachers and aides.

Teachers, for example, needed to be innovative, creative, and able to respond with enthusiasm, optimism, and sincerity to students who have diverse needs. They had to be:

1. flexible - willing to accept unconventional student needs as educational goals and to tailor individual programs to meet those needs.

2. self-directed - as they develop instructional objectives, seek out work opportunities for students, carry out on-the-job training, counsel students concerning job and social problems, locate resources and service agencies for students, and serve as advocates for the students within the school system and the local community.

3. team members - capable of delegating responsibility to other staff members and coordinating efforts of other teachers, service providers, and employers.

4. good communicators - because they are directly involved in conducting program-related public relations activities with the groups mentioned above.

5. able to work under pressure - as they face competing demands and crisis situations.

Both teachers and aides need to be able to work effectively with students who have one or more types of handicapping conditions. Classroom aides should be prepared to perform clerical duties and assist in job coaching, job development, travel training, and classroom teaching. They must be able to work flexibly, independently, and cooperatively.

Administrative Support

For a program such as the RTP to be successful, administrators, too, must be willing to be flexible. The nature and variety of student needs cannot be accommodated within standard school schedules and structures. This needs to be acknowledged and supported by administrators in the following ways:

Communication: Because the RTP model is preferably located off-campus, the unscheduled, casual, and intermittent communication between teachers and their principals may not be available to transition program staff. (In the RTP program, there was no building principal, and supervision of program staff was the responsibility of the special education supervisor.) Regularly scheduled meetings of the administrator (supervisor) and teaching staff are essential to promote communication and to avoid teacher isolation. Bi-weekly meetings are preferred. The transition program teaching staff should also be included in district special education meetings.

Joint Support by Vocational and Special Education: It is recommended that administrators promote joint support of the transition program by special and vocational education. Coordinated efforts between the two areas can increase the number of programs available to students and can enhance the visibility and understanding of program goals. If occupational education credits can be offered, this will make the program more attractive to students and more credible.

Coordination of Work Experience: In a large school district, teachers from several special and vocational education classes may be attempting to obtain work for their students, potentially contacting the same employers, who may then become confused or annoyed. It is recommended that a single coordinator be given responsibility for locating and maintaining all community work placements for the district.

Staff Evaluation: Administrators should understand the complexity of conducting a transition program for students with disabilities so that unreasonable demands are not placed on program staff. Evaluation of teacher performance is most properly conducted by the special education supervisor, who should be able to monitor staff development and offer suggestions for program improvement.

Budget: The administrator should facilitate the purchase of specialized instructional materials and supplies required by a transition program.

Graduation

With permission of their home school principal, students who have met graduation requirements could elect to participate in graduation ceremonies but defer receiving their diploma in order to continue receiving program services up to age 21 (if such a program is found to be appropriate to their needs). This is an extremely important option for students who are in need of additional services but want to graduate with their peers. It has been our experience that many students will not choose to take advantage of transition services if they are unable to go through the graduation ceremony. Districts are urged to have a policy deferring receipt of a diploma while allowing students to attend the graduation ceremony at their home high school.

Individualized Education Plan

The inclusion of vocational goals and objectives is an essential part of every secondary student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP). These goals must be (a) tied to the curriculum, (b) evaluated regularly, and (c) adjusted to meet individual needs. In our experience, including students in the process of formulating goals, objectives, and timelines enhances their commitment to their program.

Marketing

Efforts to market or promote the program are essential to gain support within the school district, from parents and from the community. Students also need to be informed about the program.

Informative brochures (see Appendix B) or letters can be sent to parents of special education students who are juniors or seniors in high school. Publications of the school district and local advocacy groups can help inform parents and educators about the program. Success stories of individual students can be published in education newsletters and local newspapers. Public knowledge of the program can lead to greatly increased employment opportunities for students. Accurate information must be provided to district personnel to aid them in making appropriate placement recommendations.

Evaluation

The outcomes of transition programs are difficult to measure. It is hard to define and evaluate whether students have made a successful transition to adult life and to determine the extent to which an educational program has contributed to this. Efforts to evaluate the RTP confirmed these difficulties.

At the onset of the project, staff members surveyed the literature to determine whether suitable instruments existed to measure project effectiveness and student progress. As a starting point, Brolin's (Kokaska and Brolin, 1985) list of 22 life-centered career education competencies - in

the areas of daily living skills, personal-social skills, occupational guidance and preparation - were identified as the areas to measure. However, at the time the project began, no instrument existed that could assess students' skill levels on these competencies.

Alternative evaluation questions were then posed, and various instruments were piloted to determine whether they would yield useful information. Selected subtests from the Brigance Diagnostic Inventory of Early Development (Brigance, 1978) were used as a pretest in the project's second year, for example, but did not appear to be a reliable or appropriate measure of the independent living skills gained by RTP students.

It was decided to use a curriculum-based assessment as a partial solution. The curriculum materials being field tested by the project for the University of Oregon included a set of pre and posttests to measure student achievement on specific skills addressed in Money Management (Nelson, Lupton, Close, Keating, Flecker, and Wells, in press) Job Search Skills (Medaglia, Close, and Slack, in press), Social Skills for Apartment Living (Wells, Keating, Close, Flecker, Auty, and McKinney, in press), and Working II (Interpersonal Skills for Employment) (Foss and Villhauer, 1986).

In addition, information on student progress was gathered through the use of the Scales of Independent Behavior (Bruininks, Woodcock, Weatherman, and Hill, 1984), an adaptive behavior scale selected for its congruence with project objectives. This instrument measures behavior in four domains: motor skills, social and communication skills, personal living skills, and community living skills. Information derived from the Woodcock-Johnson could be used to help identify areas in need of further training.

Realizing that other kinds of evaluative information in addition to student achievement were needed, the project conducted a follow-up survey of the first group of RTP participants, gathering information on parent and student satisfaction with the project and student employment status six months after they "graduated" from the project.

Other types of data collected over the course of the project included: students' attendance, work experiences, types of placements, length of employment, salary level, use of postsecondary training or state services for the handicapped, and on-the-job support to students. Cost effectiveness of the project was also calculated.

The RTP experience suggests several conclusions with implications for evaluation of other transition projects. These include:

1. The technologies for evaluating transition outcomes are evolving but presently fall short of expectations.

2. Paper and pencil tasks for students appear to be inadequate as a sole measure of student achievement. They provide some useful information but do not address more important issues of postschool adjustment.

3. Independent living skills can best be assessed through a variety of methods, including interviews of parents and students, contact with employers, observation of students in class, in training, and on job sites, etc. An approach to evaluation that uses many sources of data may be most appropriate in answering the basic questions of evaluation: Does the program make a difference, and, if so, how?

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HOW THE MODEL HAS CHANGED

Many changes and modifications in the RTP model were made over the three years of federally funded demonstration and research. The most significant changes, and the rationale behind them, are summarized in this section.

Adult Education Model

The initial design for RTP was based on adult education models in which participants work during the day and attend school at night. Evening classes were held Monday through Thursday. During the day, teachers made active efforts to see that students were placed and maintained in full or part-time employment. While this approach was able to provide a flexible alternative to the traditional high school curriculum and opportunities to gain transitional skills, unexpected difficulties arose in its implementation.

The daytime work/evening class model was found to be inappropriate for a number of reasons. First, the original model was based on an assumption that RTP students would be in the competitive market for daytime jobs. In practice, many of the jobs available to students are at night, on weekends, or intermittent ("on-call"). Students were thus likely to be home all week long with no structured activity.

Second, the evening teaching schedule was a problem for teachers. Limited contact with other professionals during the workday contributed to feelings of isolation and burnout among staff. A corollary problem was the potential for student burnout. Those who were, in fact, fully employed during the day risked being too tired to benefit from evening classes. Program staff realized that the demands of attending both work and school might lead to increased experiences of failure in one or both settings.

A third difficulty, reported early in the project by RTP staff, was that many students were coming into the program without minimal job readiness skills. While career awareness is an objective of the secondary special education program, some students had limited awareness of vocational possibilities and unrealistic expectations of the kinds of jobs for which they would be suited. Others lacked sufficient vocational training or work experience necessary to secure competitive employment.

Student Population

Other changes involved the student population to be served. Originally, the program was designed to accept only students with mild mental retardation. This was later expanded to include other mild handicapping conditions - including learning and behavior disabilities, hearing impairments and multiple mild handicaps - as it became apparent that these students could benefit from a program such as RTP. Students originally were to have been between 18 and 21 years of age, but entry criteria were broadened to include 17 year olds who wished to graduate with their classmates. The inclusion of this group greatly increased the number of students with disabilities other than mild mental retardation and made the program more attractive to secondary special needs students throughout the school district.

In response to these issues, the project was restructured in the 1986-87 academic year so that program services would be provided primarily during daytime hours; and the model was changed from a primarily group-centered, self-contained classroom to the more highly individualized and flexible approach described in this manual. We believe tnat the resulting model makes a significant contribution toward meeting the transition needs of secondary special education students.

GUIDELINES

Based on the experiences of the RTP, project staff have identified a series of recommended guidelines. They should be useful to anyone interested in developing a program to meet the needs of mildly handicapped youth as they make the transition from school to the adult world of work.

Student Population

The RTP model and the general guidelines given here are appropriate for students with a variety of mild handicapping conditions who are in their last years of secondary school. The number of academic credits earned need not affect eligibility. The program can serve students who have already completed graduation requirements together with those who are minimally or severely credit deficient, provided that students take advantage of other resources in the school and community.

Students should enter the program already able to (a) travel independently, (b) maintain appropriate standards of personal appearance, (c) comply with rules and regulations of employers, and (d) learn entry level work skills within one week of on-the-job training.

Curriculum

Teachers of a transition program cannot be expected to provide training in regular academic subjects. The curriculum should focus on readiness for employment and adult life and should include (a) personal finances, (b) social skills, (c) job search, (d) employment skills, and (e) access to community resources (e.g. mental health services, financial assistance, adult service programs such as DVR, etc.).

Class Schedule

The RTP schedule, in which students participated two days per week for 2 1/2 hours per day on a flexible basis, worked very well. It permitted students to take advantage of available resources and allowed adequate time for work.

It is recommended that students' work schedules take priority over class schedules in a transition program.

School and Community Resources

To be effective, transition programs must help students use resources within the school district and the community, including academic and practical classes offered by the schools; training programs available through community colleges, the Private Industry Council, adult services agencies, etc.; counseling, financial assistance, and other social services.

Employment Assistance

Students in the program need to be supported in finding, obtaining, and maintaining jobs. Program staff should be involved in a broad-based job development network capable of contacting service agencies and employers, responding to employer-initiated referrals, and making appropriate matches between students and job openings. Students themselves need to be active participants in the job search.

Staff members should be aware of financial incentives and assistance available to employers and should be prepared to offer assistance in modifying the job site to accommodate handicapped workers.

Work experiences should be available for students not ready for competitive employment.

Setting

The preferred setting is an off-campus location that minimizes distractions and creates an adult environment. It should be accessible to community and school resources and to potential job sites.

Staffing

Staff abilities are crucial determinants of program success or failure. eachers should be able to function effectively as both educators and case workers, providing training in the program curriculum, employment interventions, and referrals to outside resources on a flexible basis in response to individual needs. Teachers and aides must be prepared to work (both independently and as members of a professional team) with students who have a variety of handicapping conditions.

A staff ratio of approximately 12 students to each teacher is recommended.

Administrative Support

Administrators should see that the program receives coordinated support from vocational and special education and should assure the availability of special instructional equipment, staff support (e.g. deaf interpreters, teaching aides, appropriate teacher/student ratio), and supplies. Regular meetings should be scheduled between administrators and program staff.

It is strongly recommended that each district have a single person assigned to coordinate all work experience and job development efforts - for transition students and those in other district vocational programs.

Some measure of support should be made available during the summer months when school is not in session. At a minimum, this requires one aide who can provide student contacts and employer assistance as needed.

Marketing

In order to maximize the appropriateness of referrals, a transition program has to be "marketed" to principals and other administrators, to teachers, parents, and members of the multidisciplinary team . Because most districts lack experience with such programs, this involves education about the meaning of transition as much as advertisement of the program itself. Marketing should include such in-house activities as presentations at faculty meetings, feedback to staff on students' progress in the program, and informal individual communications - as well as announcements in newsletters and public media.

Evaluation

Evaluation of transition programs requires the collection of different types of information from different sources, including curriculum-based assessments; norm-referenced testing (an adaptive behavior scale is a good tool for assessing individual student progress); interviews with parents, teachers, employers, and students; and, if possible, behavior assessments.

Evaluation questions should be clearly framed. The most important questions are: How well is the program meeting student needs, and what progress are the students making?

Flexibility

Perhaps the most essential element of a transition program is flexibility. It is absolutely necessary that the program be capable of adjusting to the highly individualized needs and resources of different students and different communities. Models should not be structured too rigidly; staff members and administrators should be prepared to adjust to roles and schedules not ordinarily within school district patterns; there should be an openness to change and experimentation, all with a focus on the ultimate goal of preparing students for success as independent, productively employed adults.

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Appendix A

REALISTIC TRANSITION MODEL

5 hours a week in program

. 2 hours classroom - 2 days: a.m. or p.m.
  1 hour Employment Support group: p.m.

SAMPLE SCHEDULES

I. Student is 17, on track for graduation. Earns Math and English credit in RTP. Earns 3 credits at OSC.

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
A.M.	8:30-10:30 RTP 11:15-2:00 OSC	Homework 11:15-2:00 OSC	8:30-10:30 RTP 11:15-2:00 OSC	Homework 11:15-2:00 OSC	11:15-2:00 OSC
P.M.	3:00-5:00 Work	3:00-5:00 Work	3:00-5:00 Work	3:00-5:00 Work 5:30-6:30 ESG	3:00-5:00 Work

II. Student is 18, has 22 (44) district credits. Has opted to stay for 13th year.

A.M.	7:00-11:00 Work	7:00-11:00 Work 1:00-3:00 RTP	7:00-11:00 Work	7:00-11:00 Work 1:00-3:00 RTP	7:00-11:00 Work
P.M.				5:30-6:30 ESG	

III. Student is potential dropout, age 18 with 7 credits. Earns U.S. History at Tyee, Math and Language Arts credit in RTP, and 2 work credits.

A.M.	9:45-10:45 Tyee Homework	9:45-10:45 Tyee 1:00-3:00 RTP	9:45-10:45 Tyee Homework	9:45-10:45 Tyee 1:00-3:00 RTP	9:45-10:45 Tyee
P.M.	5:00-11:00 Work	5:00-11:00 Work	5:00-11:00 Work	3:00-4:00 ESG (Individual) 5:00-11:00 Work	5:00-11:00 Work

OSC: Highline School District Occupational Skills Center

ESG: Employment Support Group

TYEE: One of the Highline School District's High Schools

RTP: Realistic Transition Project

8. How can I refer myself/my daughter/my son to the Program?

Complete this form and mail it to: Coordinator, Secondary Special Eduction, Educational Resources and Administrative Center, 15675 Ambaum Blvd. S.W., Seattle, WA 98166

Yes, I am interested in the Realistic Transition Program for myself / my child.

Name of Student: _____

School _____

Student Year in School _____

Student's Birthdate _____

Signature _____

For Additional Information

Call

Secondary Special Education Coordinator

433-2421

HIGHLINE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
and
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

REALISTIC TRANSITION PROJECT

(SECONDARY SPECIAL EDUCATION)

Making the Transition from School to Work

HIGHLINE SCHOOL DISTRICT #401
Educational Resources and Administrative Center
15675 AMBAUM BLVD. S.W.
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON 98166

REALISTIC TRANSITION PROJECT

Many handicapped secondary students have a difficult time making the transition from school to the adult world of work. Frequently they lack the skills necessary to be successful in job situations and in managing their personal lives.

The Realistic Transition Project will help students develop these skills, which include:

- locate and secure employment
- working effectively with supervisors and co-workers;
- planning for and managing personal business;
- obtaining help from available community resources for career development/adult education/housing/health/recreation/and other on-going needs.

PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

Based on the model of continuing adult education, students in the Realistic Transition Project are helped to obtain and maintain competitive employment while simultaneously attending supportive classes. During class, an emphasis is placed on function life skills. Students will discuss issues that arise on the job, and have opportunities to rehearse optjons for handling difficult situations. In addition, they will be taught how to obtain, maintain, and change jobs, and will work toward building satisfying and successful personal lives.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. Who is eligible to participate?

Any secondary special education student who is between 17-21 years of age is eligible. In addition, the student must be motivated to work in the community, and able to provide transportation to work and school. Applicants will be interviewed and a final decision made by the screening committee.

2. Where is the Realistic Transition Project housed?

Sunnydale School
15631 DesMoines Memorial Drive
Seattle, WA 98148
(206) 433-2449

3. What hours do I attend the program?

Students are expected to work at a paid job, or to participate in work experience or vocational training. In addition, they are required to enroll in RTP classes. Individualized arrangements will be made to provide for each student's needs.

4. How long does the program last?

Students make a commitment to participate in the program one semester at a time. Students can elect to stay in the program until age 21 or until the completion of high school graduation requirements.

5. Will I receive credit toward graduation?

Yes — a maximum of 6 credits per semester can be earned for classroom work and employment.

6. How do I find a job?

Class work will include instruction in locating and obtaining employment through developing basic skills:

1. exploration of occupational choices
2. job search
3. appropriate dress and grooming
4. resume writing
5. cover letters
6. interviewing
7. temporary employment
8. unemployment insurance
9. community agencies for retraining and job finding

7. What kind of job will I have?

At entry into the program, each student's skills, interests, and abilities will be evaluated at the Highline School District's Vocational Assessment Center. A career profile will be developed, and students will be helped to secure jobs or job training which are compatible with their profiles.

Students will also be assisted when referring themselves to community agencies when appropriate. These agencies include the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, Department of Developmental Disabilities, King County Service Bureaus, King County Job Training Programs, local Community Colleges, etc.

8. Who sponsors the project?

The Realistic Transition Project is a joint effort of the University of Washington and the Highline School District, and is partially supported by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education.